1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32

CHAPTER I

THE SETTING IN TIME; THE HISTORICAL ISOLATION OF BASTAR

BASTAR STATE lies at the extreme south-east corner of the Central Provinces of India, between 17° 46′ and 20° 14′ north, and 80° 15′ and 82° 1′ east. Its area, according to the recently revised Survey of India figures, of 13,725 square miles makes it the tenth state in India in size, larger than Belgium and nearly as large as Holland. It is far larger than any of the old Central Provinces and Orissa States, with which it has recently been brought into the new Eastern States Agency. But it is one of the most sparsely peopled tracts of India, the 1931 population of 524,721 giving a density of only 34 to the square mile. If any part of India is still *terra incognita* to nearly all British officials and travellers, it is the vast tract covered by Bastar and the huge Jeypore zamindari recently transferred from the Vizagapatam Agency of Madras to the new province of Orissa. To the ordinary Indian of neighbouring districts, even to many of the few immigrant Hindu and Mussalman traders, this remains a land of savages, seeking still for human victims to sacrifice to their fetishes, skilled in herbs and simples, and potent practitioners of magic and witchcraft. Their view is little changed from that held 110 years ago by Maratha officials who described the Marias of the Abujhmar mountains to Sir Richard Jenkins, then Resident at the Court of Nagpur, as 'naked savages, living on roots and sprigs, and hunting for strangers to sacrifice'.

Bastar has in fact always been an almost unknown backwater of the river of Indian history. The late Chief, Maharani Prafulla Kumari Devi, at her accession in 1924 was the last legitimate survivor of one of the most ancient royal families of southern India, the Kakatiya, which reigned at Warangal from about A.D. 1150 to 1425, first possibly as feudatories of the Chalukya kings and then independently. In Bastar folk-song, Annam Deo, the first to reign in Bastar, is spoken of as 'Chalkibans Raja', which may be a corruption of 'Chalukya-bans' and indicate that the Kakatiya family was a cadet branch of the Chalukya. Pratap Rudra, the greatest and the last independent Kakatiya king of Warangal, lost his life and independence in battle with the Mohammedan invaders of the Deccan under Ahmad Shah Bahmani early in the fifteenth century and, according to Bastar tradition and folk-song, his brother Annam Deo fled across the Godavari into Bastar, which had

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

PLATE I

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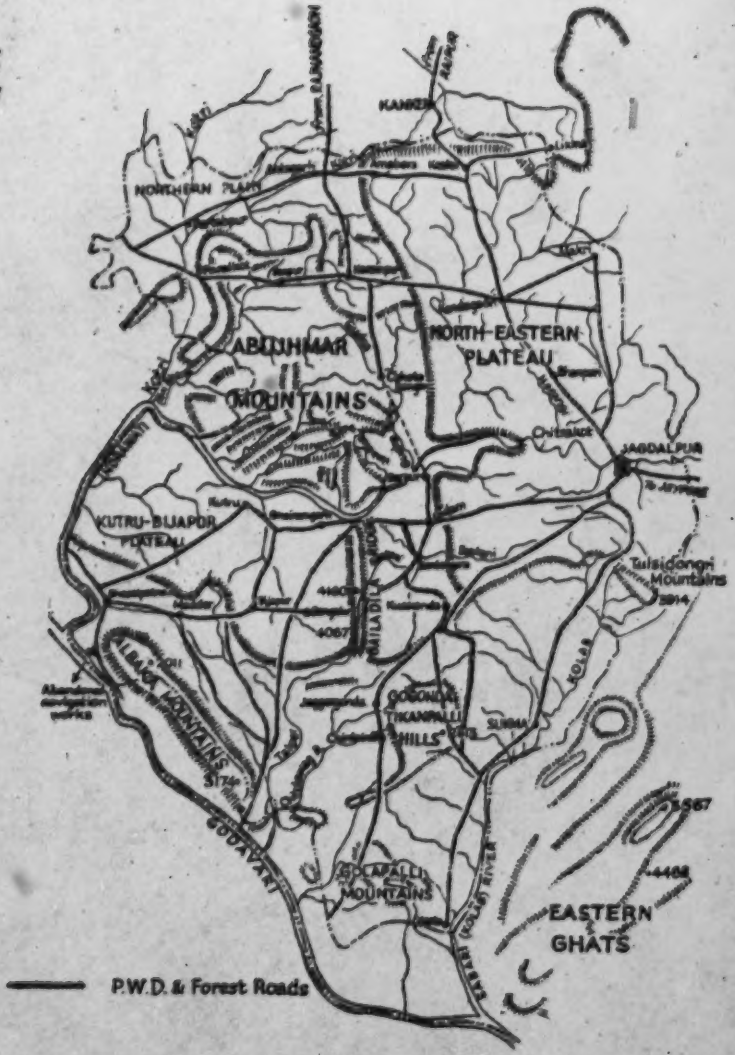

BASTAR STATE—NATURAL DIVISIONS
Scale (approx.) : 1 inch= 32 miles

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

●131
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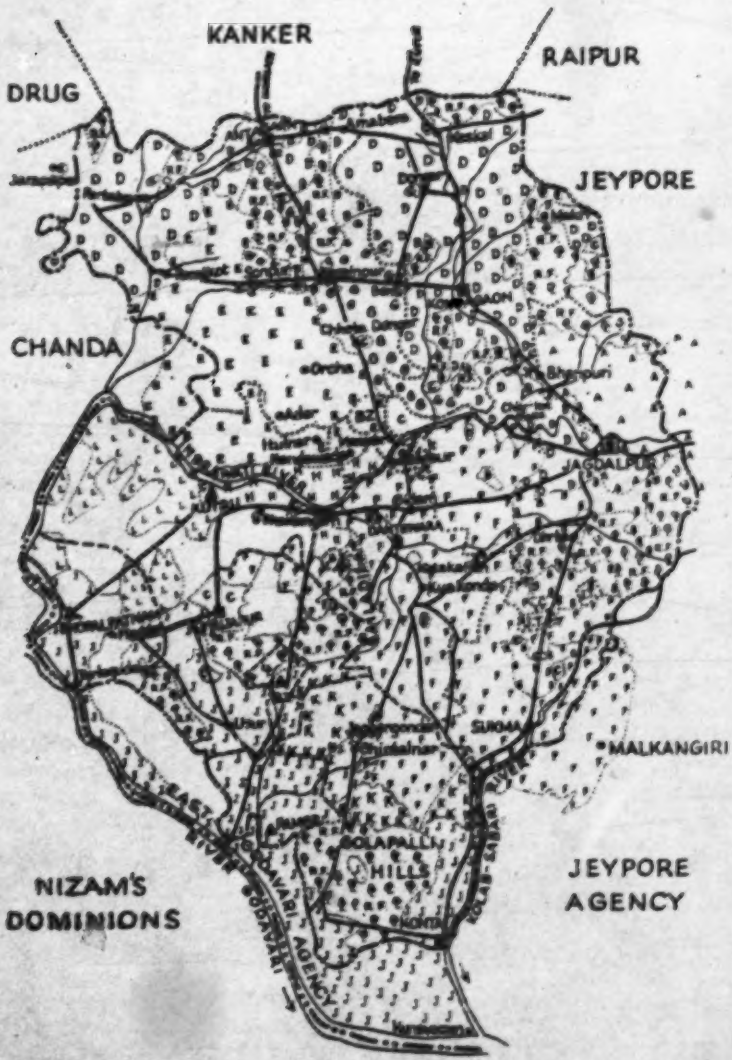
PLATE IV



BASTAR STATE ETHNOGRAPHIC MAP
Scale (approx.) : 1 inch = 32 miles

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
A W32 Gond A W32

Bison-horn Maria and Muria neighbours, and seldom learnt even by those State officials who are excellent interpreters in other dialects; and I fancy that the Hindi admixture is considerably less in ordinary use than in the specimens collected for the Linguistic Survey. It is certainly untrue of Parji that the name indicates rather a tribal than a linguistic difference from Gondi proper. The most marked difference of customs is their style of dancing, which resembles that of the small remnant of the Munda tribe of Gadbas still surviving in two or three villages between them and the Bhattras; they dance in rollicking circles accompanied by their own whistling or by wooden flutes, in a manner reminiscent of certain figures of the 'Lancers', and as different as their dancing dress from the Bison-horn dances of their Maria neighbours, and pleasanter to see and hear than any other dances of Bastar except the Gadba.

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KEY TO PLATE IV

State or Provincial Boundary
Tribal Boundary .....
Roads, Forest
Tahsil Headquarters ■
Bhattras A
Halbas C
Marias, Abujhmar or Hill E
"Jhorias" or Murias probably ones Hill Marias, now lowlanders G
Koitor of the riverain tract or Dorlas J

Tahsil or Zamindari Boundary ----
Roads, P.W.D.
Reserved Forests
Zamindari Headquarters A
Parjas B
Murias D
Marias, Bison-horn or Dandami F
Hill Marias influenced by Bison-horn Marias H
Mixed Dorla & Bison-horn Maria, or latter exposed to Telugu influence K

Mixed Dorla & Hill Maria, or Hill Maria who have almost become Dorla L

131
162

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

101 often difficult to say where the Koitor begin or cease to be Maria. Much depends on the idiosyncrasies of the census enumerators. Moreover just as in Bastar there is really no hard and fast ethnological boundary line between Hill Maria and the tribes generally referred to as 'Muria', so in Chanda to the north and west of the zamindaris many now classed as Gond would undoubtedly at one time have been regarded as Maria, while where Chanda district borders on the west of the Narainpur (Antagarh) tahsil of Bastar the villagers are ethnically identical on both sides of the border, but on the Chanda side are called Maria and on the Bastar side Muria: of this I had a remarkable instance on my journey north from Surjagarh[1] in Ahiri zamindari to Jarawandi,[2] where the forest track crosses the two small west-protruding tongues of Bastar shown near the north-west corner of Bastar in the ethnographic map on page 40, near the Antagarh villages of Udcha[3] and Irpanar[4] in the southern tongue and Markanar[5] in the northern tongue; men of one clan living in the tongues called themselves Muria while their fellow-clansmen in the adjacent Ahiri villages called themselves Maria.

101 Drug district, Chanda district and Bastar State all meet at the north-west corner of Bastar, as the map on page 40 makes clear. At
161 this corner of Drug are the Drug Partially Excluded Areas, the zamindaris of Aundhi, Koracha, Panabaras and Ambagarh-Chauki transferred to Drug from Chanda in 1907. These zamindaris had in 1941 a population of 82,202, of whom aboriginals numbered 51,452, or 626 in every thousand. Of the latter some 16,750 were returned as practising the tribal religion, and the bulk of these must have been Gond. No 'Marias' were returned. Yet again, especially in Aundhi and Koracha, there is no racial difference between those returned there as 'Gond', their Chanda neighbours returned as 'Maria' and their Bastar neighbours returned as 'Muria'. Reference to land revenue and settlement records even in Panabaras zamindari[6] shows that down to the great famines at the end of the nineteenth century and even later the local headmen and ryots were frequently recorded as Maria by tribe.

101 All that in fact can safely be predicated of the country covered
131 by my tour in the Chanda and Drug zamindaris is that according to

[1] *Ordnance Survey of India*, Qr. Inch Sheet 5A. ref. MV4774.
[2] Ibidem, ref. MQ5121.
[3] Ibidem, ref. MV4898.
[4] Ibidem, ref. MV5298.
[5] Ibidem, ref. MQ5314.
[6] See for example Grigson, *The Aboriginal Problem in the Central Provinces and Berar* (Nagpur, 1944), pp. 79-81.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

Central Provinces terminology it was Maria country, or had till recently been thus considered; according to modern Bastar terminology it would be considered Muria country. To this there is one exception. The map on page 20 shows a projection westward into Chanda district of the Abujhmar Mountains between the western border of the State and the Kotri River, north of the Indrawati, just west of the junction of the Behra Mar, Jatwada and Farsal *parganas* of Narainpur (Antagarh tahsil) shown in the sketch-map on page 33. On this projection of the hills there are, speaking from memory, seven or eight villages which are definitely Hill Maria like the adjacent Abujhmar villages of Bastar, completely Hill Maria in culture, peopled by tribesmen who, like the Hill Maria of Bastar, call themselves Meta (Highland) Koitor, and despise the Maria of Lahiri and the other plains villages of Ahiri zamindari below their fastnesses.

I was able to make a rapid tour through much of this Chanda and Drug country in December 1940, and January 1941; certain preliminary investigations before my visit were made for me in Chanda by Mr. J. D. Kerawala of the Central Provinces and Berar Civil Service, who was then the Sub-divisional Officer, and he was with me throughout my tour. Some of the administrative and economic notes made on this tour were incorporated in various chapters of my book *The Aboriginal Problem in the Central Provinces and Berar*[1] to which I shall refer hereafter as *The Aboriginal Problem*, for the sake of brevity. I also filled a thick note-book with ethnographic and anthropological material, and had intended to use that material for this Note. Unfortunately the note-book perished when my house at Hyderabad was burnt down in a sudden senseless riot on the Ides of March 1946, along with almost all my Chanda photographs, the note-books, manuscripts and photographs of twenty-five years in India, and the whole of my library. No doubt this has simplified packing to quit India, but so far as this Note is concerned it has meant depriving it of what would have made it most valuable. It has therefore to be written from memory, and references in *The Aboriginal Problem*.

Let me now describe the tour generally, mentioning the places visited and the persons and things seen. My first halt was at Allapilli[2] in Sironcha tahsil, the site of the teak saw-mills of the provincial Forest Department, a few miles from Ahiri,[3] the headquarters of the Ahiri zamindari, which I visited from Allapilli.

[1] Nagpur, Government Printing, Central Provinces and Berar, 1944.
[2] *Ordnance Survey of India*, Sheet 65A, ref. MV0852.
[3] Ibidem, ref. MV0149.

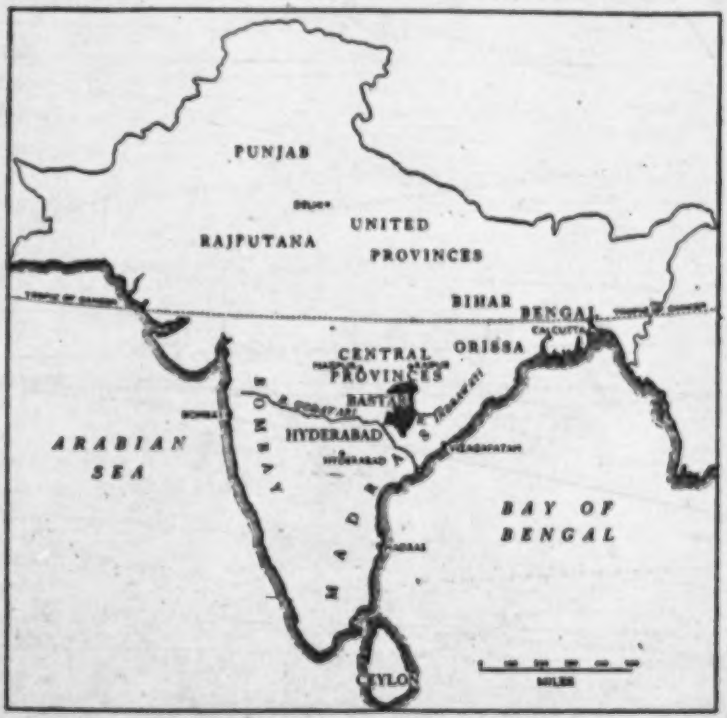
2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I. Bastar State

● 131 THE great plain of Chhattisgarh stretches down past Raipur and Dhamtari in hot and dusty monotony till it spends itself against the hills of Kanker. Thenceforward the journey is a never-failing delight; as the traveller moves towards the Bastar plateau the countryside breaks into song about him; he is greeted by hardy smiling woodmen singing at their work; the skyline is broken by fantastic piles of rock; all around is the evergreen sal forest. Presently he sees looming up before him a row of sharply-rising hills, the sentinels that stand on guard before the country of the ghotul. The white pillars that mark the boundary of the State are soon passed, and the long steep ascent of the Keskal Ghat must be essayed. From the summit there is a magnificent view of the great sea of hill and forest below.



INDIA, SHOWING THE POSITION OF BASTAR STATE

Bastar is a large State of 13,725 square miles lying between 17° 46′ and 20° 14′ North and 80° 15′ and 82° 1′ East. It is bounded on the north by Kanker

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

131 State and the Drug District of the Central Provinces, on the west by the Ahiri Zamindari of the Chanda District, on the east by the great Jeypore Zamindari of Orissa, and to the south by the Nizam's Dominions. In 1931 its population was 524,721 giving a density of only 34 to the square mile, but in the last ten years the figure has risen to 634,912. The State is divided into six tahsils and four zamindaris, and is at present administered by a Diwan resident at Jagdalpur, the capital, in the minority of the Maharaja.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF BASTAR STATE

An admirable account of the geography and administration of the State is given by Grigson in his standard *Maria Gonds of Bastar*, which should be consulted by every reader of this book.[1] Bastar is roughly bisected by the great Indrawati river which flows west from Kalahandi through the Jagdalpur Tahsil and the south of the Abujhmar Mountains to the Chanda border. Here we are not concerned with the beautiful and fascinating country south of the river; our business is with the north.

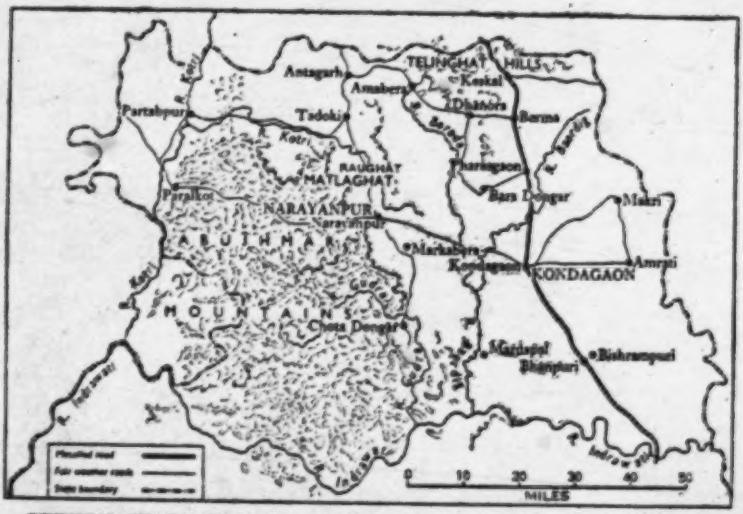
[1] W. V. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar* (Oxford, 1938).

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

INTRODUCTION

131 The territory north of the Indrawati is divided into three administrative divisions. The first, in the north-east, is the Kondagaon Tahsil; the second, in the north-west, is the Narayanpur, formerly the Antagarh, Tahsil, and the third, to the south, is the Jagdalpur Tahsil. Of these only the first two are inhabited by the type of Muria whose institutions and life are the subject of this book; in the heavily populated and fertile lowlands of the Jagdalpur Tahsil the Muria have no ghotul and, under Palace and other influences, have largely abandoned their characteristic beliefs and practices.

133 The Kondagaon Tahsil occupies the great north-eastern plateau of Bastar. This plateau, which is some 2400 feet above sea-level, runs south from the Telinghat Hills as far as Tulsidongri below Jagdalpur. To the east it extends



PHYSICAL FEATURES OF THE NARAYANPUR AND KONDAGAON TAHSILS

into Jeypore and Kalahandi, and on the west is bordered by the Matlaghat and a range of hills extending south from Benur to Karikot. The scenery is green and pleasant, but rather monotonous except round Bara Dongar—where there are picturesque hills—and in the Chalka Pargana in the neighbourhood of the Boroda and Baordig rivers, where great rocks rising above the fields and forest combine with the quiet river views to make many pictures of serene beauty.

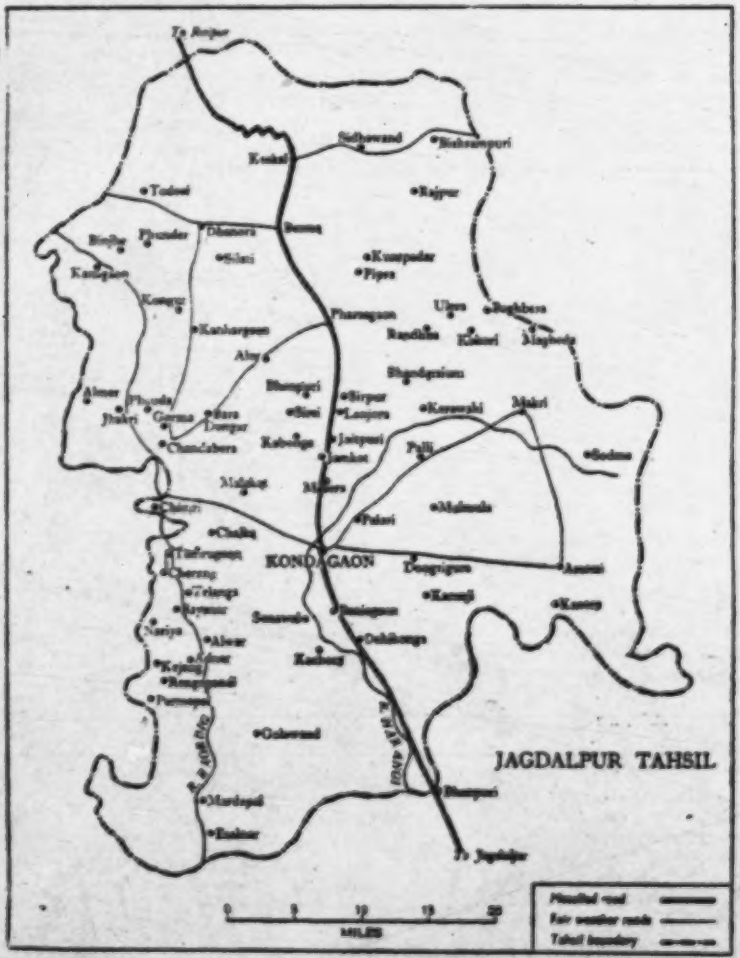
There are two main rivers in the tahsil. The Baordig flows from the north-east corner of the plateau, crosses the main road at Lanjora, winds round by Malakot, cuts the Kondagaon-Narayanpur road at Alwa, passing mostly through scrubby jungle and open tracts of embanked rice-fields, with occasional hills strewn with rocky boulders. Finally it forces its way between steep banks and large rocks till it joins the Boroda near Bayanar. The Boroda comes down through the Amabera Pargana, into the Kongur Pargana, across very similar country, then flows on with the Baordig to join the Indrawati at Karikot.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

133 491 These are the main features of the Kondagaon Tahsil: a main road, open all the year round and vibrating day and night to the rumble of lorries connecting the capital with the greater world. A high plateau, broken by one range of hills running north from Bara Dongar and to the south and east.

●[131 491]



KONDAGAON TAHSIL

Two main rivers and many streams. Forest everywhere, mainly sal forest, green all the year. Four fair-weather roads; one east from Keskal along the northern border to Bishrampuri and on into Jeypore and the Likma Forest

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER TWO

THE BISON-HORN MARIA

I

The so-called Maria of Bastar fall naturally into two divisions distinguished by many details of culture and tradition, the Hill Maria of the Abujhmar Mountains and the Bison-horn Maria living to the south of the Indrawati River. A full account of both these tribes has been given by W. V. Grigson, and his book should be read by those who wish to have a fuller background of Maria life than the present volume can supply. In this chapter I will only give a brief summary of the life and customs of the Bison-horn Maria.

The Bison-horn Maria, who are distinguished from the other aboriginals of Bastar by the splendid head-dress they use for their marriage dances, numbered about 156,000 in 1931, and I estimate their present strength at about 175,000. They are distributed all over southern Bastar, among the entrancing hills of Dantewara, in the dry forests of Bijapur, among the hot but lovely lowlands of Konta, in the remote Sukma and Kutru Zamindaris. On the borders of the main Maria stock are a number of communities which really belong to it, the Koya of the extreme south, the Dorla who claim to be a superior caste and the mixed population along the banks of the Indrawati and reaching up towards the Muria country beyond Barsur. The Dorla and Koya dance in Bison-horn Maria fashion; the mixed people to the north combine the customs of the Hill Maria with their own. In the neighbourhood of Jagdalpur, the Maria gradually lose their distinctiveness as they approach the town and merge into the southern Muria.

There are few people in India more attractive than the Bison-horn Maria, physically charming, of good stature, perfect figure, finely featured with carefully tended hair, often a lovely golden-brown in colour. Both men and women are very strong; the men can carry heavy loads great distances, endure long and arduous hunting expeditions and dance all night bearing their great drums. Their health is fairly good, but they are afflicted with yaws, though the work of the

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

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632
625

[Facing p. 18(A)]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

[Facing p. 18(B)]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

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